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# The Modern Language Journal

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VOLUME VI

MARCH, 1922

No. 6

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A STANDARD MINIMUM IN A FOUR YEAR HIGH SCHOOL COURSE IN FRENCH, GERMAN, AND SPANISH

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By C. M. PURIN

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THREE years ago there were appointed by the Association of Modern Language Teachers of the Central West and South committees to draw up standard four year syllabi for high school French, German and Spanish respectively. The reports of the three committees were officially adopted at the annual meeting in Chicago, May 6 and 7 of the past year. A perusal of these reports discloses a consensus of opinion on the following points.

1) The *chief aim* of a high school course in a modern foreign language, whether the course be of four, three or two years, or only of one year, should be the acquisition of a ready and accurate reading knowledge.

2) In view of the present demand for a knowledge of spoken French, German or Spanish, correct pronunciation and *some facility in speaking* the foreign language should also be aimed at.

3) The *amount of required grammar in the first year* is to be reduced to the merest essentials. All important grammatical topics should be covered by the end of the second year; the study of syntax, as distinct from morphology, to constitute the task of the third and fourth years in connection with work in composition and reading.

In two respects the three reports do not tally in their recommendations; viz;

a) *As to method.* The reports of the Spanish and of the German committees favor the direct method, especially in the beginning stages of the instruction, i.e. during the first two years. The

French report takes no account of methods, leaving that matter to the individual teacher.

b) *As to the amount of required reading.* Since the direct method requires ample time for oral practice in the foreign language, the amount of required reading in the Spanish and German reports is considerably smaller than that suggested in the French report, as borne out by the following table.

	<i>French</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>Spanish</i>
1st Year.	50-100 pp.	Not stated.	Not stated.
2d Year.	250-300 pp.	140 pp.	150 pp.
3d Year.	600 pp. or more.	280 pp.	250 pp.
4th Year.	About the same as in the third year.	500 pp.	400 pp.

Considering the fact that the French report does acknowledge the desirability of "some facility in speaking the language" it would seem that the amount of required reading in French for the first three years, and more particularly for the second and third years, ought to be somewhat reduced in order to give time for the necessary drill in the foreign language. On the other hand, the question of method might be left out of all of the reports, provided that acceptable pronunciation on the part of teacher (as well as pupils) be made an indispensable condition. The resolution of the National Federation of Modern Language Teachers that "Teachers who cannot be certified to do the oral work should be allowed to teach reading courses only" surely does not mean that reading courses can be taught without actual reading, i.e. pronouncing.

With these modifications, the reports would meet, I believe, actual conditions and situations and the approval of the teachers in our secondary schools.

It might be well, also to define more clearly, in a general preface to the three reports, the terms "*reading knowledge*" and "*oral practice*" (oral work, oral drill) since they seem to cause more than a little confusion.

To bring the matter before the members of the three committees and to secure expression of opinion from the body of modern language teachers in general, I venture to offer my own interpretation of these terms:

By a "*reading knowledge*" I understand

a) the ability to pronounce correctly, fluently, and with proper intonation; and

b) the ability to understand, without a recourse to translation into the vernacular or to the dictionary (except looking up words of rare occurrence or words and terms not met with in the year's work) the content of the piece read in its parts or as a whole.

This definition of a "reading knowledge" is to apply to the work of any one of the four years within the scope of the ground covered each year. At the end of the first year pupils should be able to read, in the manner indicated, prose of the grade of difficulty of Seeligmann's *Altes und Neues*, Guerber's *Contes et Légendes*, and Roessler-Remy's First Spanish Reader. Upon the completion of the second year pupils would be expected to read Storm's *Immensee*, Malot's *Sans Famille*, and Escrich's *Fortuna*. The reading knowledge of the pupils at the end of the third year might be tested on texts of the grade of *Burg Neideck*, *L'Abbé Constantin*, and *La Hermana San Sulpicio*; and at the end of the fourth year on texts like *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe*, *Tartarin de Tarascon*, and *El Capitán Veneno*.

Concomitantly, pupils are expected to answer in the foreign language questions bearing on the text read and reproduce in the foreign language, orally and in writing, texts or portions of texts studied in the class-room with a fair degree of grammatical accuracy.

The acquisition of this sort of reading knowledge, in the briefest possible time, necessitates, in my experience, a considerable amount of oral practice in the foreign language.

The term "oral practice" comprises, in my interpretation, the following class-room activities in the foreign language:

a) Well prepared questions and answers based on the piece of material assigned for reading.

b) Grammatical drill (but not explanations of grammatical principles, i.e. not the teaching of theoretical grammar) on the forms and constructions occurring in the piece read.

c) Vocabulary drill on words and terms of more frequent occurrence in order to store up a supply of useful words and expressions.

d) Reproduction or paraphrasing by the pupils of parts of the reading lesson or of the entire piece, as the occasion may seem to warrant.

e) Memorizing of parts of the reading assignment, as an additional means for the acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical

forms and constructions. (Committing to memory of lyrics and ballads has a purpose distinct from the above.)

Years of experience and observation have convinced me that a reading knowledge, as defined by me, can not be easily imparted without the aid of motor-auditory images, i.e. without oral practice. I do not wish to deny, of course, that mere reading (either silently or aloud) will produce, in the case of the linguistically gifted pupils, a certain degree of reading ability (i. e. a general understanding of the materials read), but the impressions received will be neither as vivid nor as lasting as those conveyed through the combination of the visual and the motor-auditory speech images. If reading is to mean more than a troublesome analysis of foreign materials, followed by an even more troublesome synthesis (as in the study of Greek and Latin), it must be preceded by an active exercise of the speech mechanism. In order to get the thought of the sentence readily, that is, in order to read fluently and intelligently, it is necessary that we have no difficulty with pronunciation nor with the forms or the syntax. Only by ample and well arranged and conducted oral practice can we gain, within reasonable time, such a familiarity with forms and constructions that reading becomes fluent. (Cf. Muenzinger, *Theory of the Direct Method*.)

As regards the use of English in the class-room, I am fully in accord with the statement of the Austrian Minister of Public Instruction as quoted in the Spanish report (p. 78, M. L. J. Nov. 1920) to wit: "The teacher of modern languages should bear in mind that he must use the language which is the subject of study as much as possible, and the language of his pupils as much as necessary; but he should never forget that he must at all times be intelligible to all the pupils."

A line of demarcation should be drawn between Oral Practice and Conversation, which, for class-room purposes, are two utterly distinct activities. Oral Practice comprises systematically prepared linguistic exercises by means of which a definite number of new words and definite principles of grammar contained in and illustrated by the text or portion of text assigned for each day's work are to be practiced. In contrast to Oral Practice (sometimes designated as Speaking), conversation is not based on a piece of connected reading material; it deals mainly with concrete objects and everyday activities. Oral Practice is a means to a definite

end; it is the most reliable guide toward a fluent and ready reading knowledge. Conversation leads nowhere in particular. It may help the student when traveling in foreign parts to get his trunk off the pier or to get a shave or a hair cut. Time spent on conversation in our high schools is time misspent, particularly if attempted by novices in the profession.

Finally a word regarding the use of translation (from the foreign language into English) and retranslation (from English into the foreign language). All language may be looked upon as a set of habits, habits of articulation and habits of coordination of mental images and experiences. To acquire a habit, a frequent recurrence of experiences is a necessary condition. Hence, the more French, German or Spanish a student hears and uses the sooner will he become proficient in the foreign idiom or in the habit of coordination. Hence, also, translation (or retranslation) while in itself an exceedingly valuable exercise, will, in the early stages of instruction, do more harm than good. Nothing is more destructive to the acquisition of new speech habits than a frequent and conscious juxtaposition of the mother tongue. The too early use of translation leads the student to form his French, German or Spanish sentences by substitution of English approximations and by synthesis, whereas the foreign sentences ought to appear in his consciousness as unitary apperceptive acts. At a later stage, say in the third and fourth years, when the foreign speech habits have been sufficiently well established, translation will be found a profitable exercise.

The most valuable benefit of translation as a linguistic exercise (says Muenzinger in his Theory of the Direct Method) consists in the training of the aesthetic sense as regards literary style. But aside from this, translation is the best means for training the students in the appreciation and exact interpretation of the relationship of words in a given construction; and while a premature use of translation is to be avoided, its employment in later years cannot be dispensed with. As the well known Danish educator puts it, "Man kann den Sprachunterricht wohl ohne bewusste Vergleichung der Sprachen anfangen, nicht aber abschliessen" (*Psychologie der Sprachpaedagogik*, p. 186).

In closing, may I reiterate that the above suggestions are made in the sincere hope that the three committees will take under con-

sideration the possibility of issuing a general introduction to the reports, and that the introduction will contain uniform recommendations regarding the amount of work to be done each year (in any one of the languages),

- a) in grammar
- b) in reading
- c) in oral practice (per cent of time devoted)
- d) in translation and retranslation
- e) written work.

It will also be useful to the teachers to have the Committee give a statement of aims, and a definition of the terms "reading knowledge" and "oral practice" as distinct from "conversation."

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## FRENCH VERB TABLES, A CRITICAL DISCUSSION

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### *II. How is the Inflection of a Verb Presented?*

In a former article we have discussed the number of conjugations that need to be distinguished in teaching the French verb, incidentally raising the question of regularity and irregularity. The present discussion will take up the order and arrangement in which the forms of the individual verbs are presented in tables.

Such tables should enable the learner to organize and retain in his memory a complete list or picture of the inflectional forms of the type verbs. In our school grammars they are generally given in an appendix and are meant to be used after the student has by successive steps learned the individual tenses. In this way pedagogical practice has, on the whole, thus far used a 'part method,' spreading the acquisition of the complete conjugation over at least one semester's work and alternating it with the learning of the other parts of speech. Only rather late in the course some sort of a 'formation table' is given, the rules of which are not necessarily applicable to 'regular' verbs, such as *lever* or *recevoir*, and the systematic study of the 'irregular' types is then begun. Those that